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Behind the scenes in canneries

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"This investigation was planned and made by Miss Marjorie White."
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Behind the Scenes in Canneries

Investigation Conducted by

THE CONSUMERS' LEAGUE OF NEW YORK

1930

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Behind the Scenes in Canneries

Published—April, 1930

The Consumers' League of New York
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This investigation was planned and made by Miss Marjorie White. She was assisted in the field work by Miss Edith Dudley. The Consumers' League Committee, under whom the study was made, put into final shape the reports of the investigators. The members of the Committee take this opportunity to express their appreciation of the work done by the investigators, particularly in view of the hardships to which they were subjected during their employment in the canneries.

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Bean line in a cannery not located in New York State but showing excellent arrangement of process and seating.

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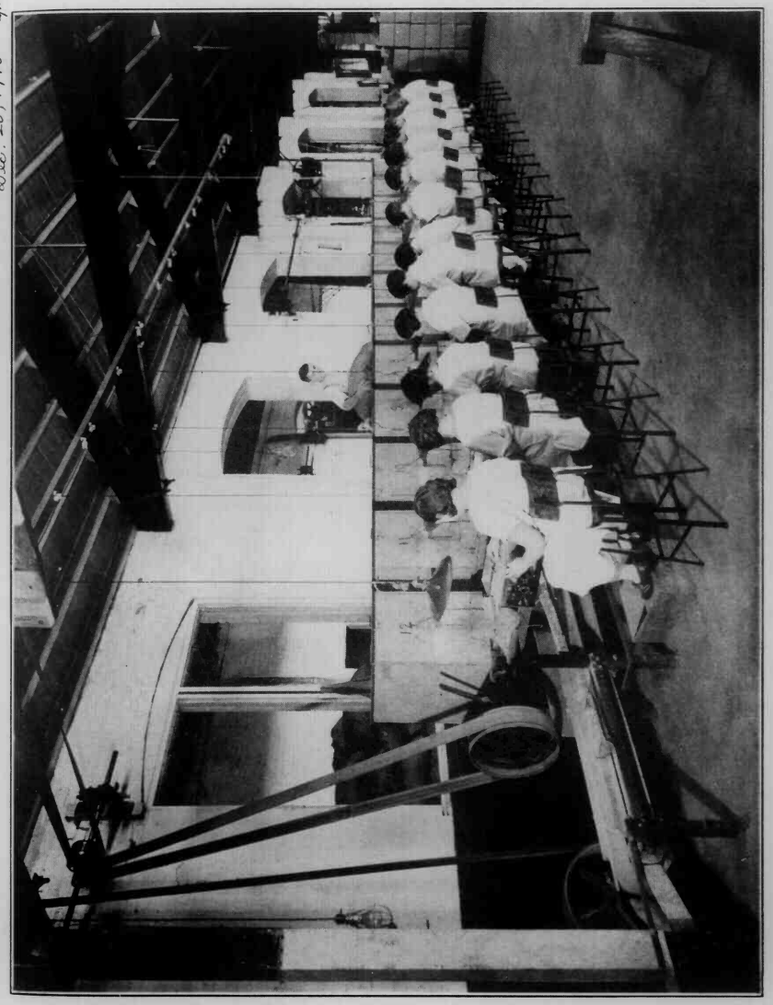

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FOREWORD

IT is welcome news, as this report is ready for publication, to learn that the New York State Canners' Association at its annual meeting agreed to co-operate with the State Department of Labor in giving attention day by day to the problems of overtime in order to work out some scientific solution of this vexing question, and to ask its members to abide strictly by the provisions of the child labor and safety laws.

The Consumers' League planned its inquiry and collected the facts contained in this report before the canners had been aroused to take action by the stirring words of the Industrial Commissioner. Our report shows an archaic disregard in many canneries for the workers' health and comfort and little up-to-date conception of the gain in production, quantity and quality, that follows changes such as we suggest. With the shortness of the season, June through October, as an excuse, the canners have continued working in old, inadequate quarters without many essential improvements. With the perishability of the raw material as an excuse, they have said they must work overtime when the ripe fruit and vegetables come in from the farms and have been permitted exceptions from the labor laws to do so. Although other industries are held to the 51-hour law, they are allowed to employ women up to 66 hours a week at the peak of the season. Yet, after all, these are only the ordinary problems of management and the workers should not be called on to carry the burden due to lack of planning for these ever recurring emergencies. Wages are, we believe, among the lowest paid in the state—usually $10.20 or $12.75 for a 51-hour week. From necessity, the women work overtime as long as strength holds out, whatever the sacrifice in health.

These are the basic facts that must be faced at what we hope is the parting of the ways—between the old and the new. It is toward solving these problems, emulating the new practices of their industry in other states, that the co-operation of the canners

and the Industrial Commissioner will be directed. There can be no doubt that the hoped for changes will, if sufficiently comprehensive, be of lasting benefit, not only to employers but to workers in the whole industry. Public support should be given their efforts, and our report will acquaint the public with present conditions and furnish standards that must be taken into consideration when the adequacy of the proposed changes are judged.

MARY W. DEWSON,
President of the Consumers' League of New York.

INTRODUCTION

For many years the canning industry of New York has been of interest to the public because of the large number of women employed, and also, unfortunately, because of its undesirable conditions of work. Successive investigations—an important one by the Factory Investigating Commission in 1913—have shown the evils of long hours of work for women, and the existence of widespread child labor. The present investigation was undertaken on account of the lively interest of the consumer in food industries; and especially because it was strongly indicated that conditions of work were not satisfactory.

New York State is maintaining an important position in the canning industry. It is the second most important state in the country in the number of persons engaged in the industry, only California outnumbering it. It is the third most important both in the value of the product, and in number of canneries. Only California and Maryland exceed it in number of plants. It continues to lead all other states in the output of green and wax beans, in sauerkraut, and in apple sauce.

The Consumers' League decided to make an investigation by sending workers into the canneries because it believed that in this manner the truest picture could be obtained. Owing to the prolonged drought of last summer, the cannery season was late and short, but our investigators were active in the field from the beginning of July to the end of September, the peak months of the canning period. They worked in both large and small plants well distributed through the cannery zone. Besides obtaining information from other workers, they themselves experienced as employees the conditions in plants employing about 10% of all the women in the industry. We are of the opinion, therefore, that their reports represent an accurate cross-section of the conditions existing in the summer of 1929. The facts ascertained are fully corroborated by those of previous cannery studies.

General Findings

Decrease of Child Labor. One of the encouraging facts that has come to our attention is the decrease in the number of children employed. As contrasted with the findings of 1913, there has been a definite reduction in the number of children employed for the hand snipping of beans. This is to some extent due to the introduction of snipping machinery, but it is also evident that the canners themselves have taken steps to keep the children out of the sheds.

Less Lifting. The use of machinery for bean snipping has also lessened the amount of heavy work and lifting that formerly was a hardship for the women.

Illegal Overtime. On the other hand, in New York, women are still employed for excessively long hours, and often at night, in both cases in violation of the state labor law.

Low Wage Rates. Twenty or 25 cents an hour, that is, $10.20 or $12.75 a week for the usual factory week of 51 hours, is so little that the workers welcome overtime regardless of their health.

Antiquated Employment Methods. The canners do not use business-like methods to secure all possible local help. The practice of exceeding the daily capacity of their plants and relying upon overtime employment instead of securing more help, seems as marked in those otherwise progressive canneries as in the ones less well equipped.

Undue Exposure.

1. The shed workers, as a rule, are not protected from inclement weather, but are often exposed to rain and cold, which results in illness and consequent irregularity of attendance.

2. Many women work on wet floors all day, and in some occupations they are wet to the skin because of dripping belts and tables. Since the weather is often cold, such wetness may be a menace to health.

Unnecessary Noise. The noise of machinery other than that at which women are employed, but close to them, is a constant source of discomfort and so distracts their attention as to impair efficiency.

Concerning these important matters, there is little evidence of change which might well be expected of forward-looking management after the Factory Investigating Commission's report in 1913. This is especially disappointing in view of the progress made by competing plants in Wisconsin and California. The latter two, by developing extensive systems of adjusting raw materials to plant capacity, by organizing the labor supply, and by setting minimum wage rates including higher rates for overtime beyond the basic day, have made it possible for hours of work to be regulated, and have made it a matter of pride to provide working conditions of far greater comfort and efficiency.

We have given special attention to the environment of the worker presenting the findings as to such concrete conditions as wetness, exposure to weather, noise of machines, etc. The important sections on hours and wages are given last. In order to show graphically the conditions found, we shall quote liberally from the reports of our investigators. We believe that these throw new light on some of the chief defects of management that are now a reflection on the industry. They also show some of the improvements that progressive canners have adopted.

WHAT THE WORK IS LIKE

The investigators were employed at practically all of the usual cannery processes which women do. In order to make clear the picture of the work, a brief statement of the processes is given here.

Peas. The first rush of cannery work comes in the pea season. Peas are run on moving belts past the workers who pick out by hand the shucks, hard peas, and occasional pebbles and thistle buds. All the other processes for peas, such as the filling, capping of cans, and cooking, are done by machinery which is tended by men.

Beans. The bean season follows and lasts longer than any other. Hand snipping is still done, but machines are used for snipping beans increasingly. They were found in four-fifths of the canneries visited. The snipped beans, like the peas, pass over the sorting belts so that any defective ones or those that are too small or too large can be picked out by the women, who also push the beans into cans and weigh them.

Corn. Corn comes unhusked to the cannery shed and is brought to the worker either through chutes from an upper story, or by men who lift it from the floor and put it into position for the women to feed into the machines. The husk is torn off by metal fingers and as the ear falls, the nub is cut off by a knife in the machine. The ears go on to the sorting belt where the women pull or cut off any part of the husk that is not removed by the machines, and any spoiled or discolored kernels.

Tomatoes. Tomatoes are scalded before they reach the tables where the women peel them by hand, remove the stem, and cut out any bad spots. This work is one of the wettest operations for women.

Little skill is needed for any of the hand operations of preparing fruits and vegetables for canning. The one important machine at which women were found at work is the corn huskers. Owing to the use of sanitary cans, women are no longer required for the minute inspection which was formerly needed before the final sealing of the old type can.

THE MOVING BELT

Most of the women find work at the sorting tables difficult because the constant watching of moving objects strains their eyes. Many declare that it makes them feel dizzy and sick. They try to overcome this feeling by looking up the belt, or fixing their eyes on a still object at frequent intervals, by leaving the belt for a few moments, or by standing frequently. Some of the women say they are troubled most during the last hours of a five-hour stretch, when they are tired and hungry, or when the belt is speeded up too much.

The investigators found that complaints increased when the belts were shaking and jolting due to the vibration of the attached machine (snipper), or to some defect or improper adjustment. And of course the discomfort was greatest when the corn, peas, or beans "danced a jig" as they passed along. Sometimes this jiggling occurred spasmodically, and sometimes for several hours continuously.

Our workers reported that their eyes were very tired after a day's work at the belt, and frequently their fellow workers said they had a headache at the end of the day.

The following illustrations are taken from the investigators' notes.

> Edna G. told me after lunch today that she had a splitting headache. "Working at the sorting table always makes me seasick," she said. Others complained of tired eyes and nausea. Mrs. R. said she tried to read her newspaper at lunch and the letters kept bobbing up and down just like the beans on the belt.

> The bean sorting table shook most of the day. Before lunch and about 4 o'clock I suddenly felt dizzy and blinked my eyes and closed them hard, then fixed them on a stack of pea vines standing outside. "Getting sea-sick?" asked Mrs. B. who had been watching me. I nodded my head. "I guess

> you're needing food," she said. "I used to get sea sick. When I get kinda empty inside, I go to the washroom or stand outdoors." The foreman came to our table to inspect the beans. I told him I was dizzy. "These tables need new underpinnin's," he said. "I tighten 'em up and they stop shaking for awhile but work loose again in no time. I say the snippers are run too fast. The whole thing's adjusted for a set speed. Running it faster knocks it loose."

> We had "chops" all the morning. (Chops are beans of all sizes and shapes which will be cut in small pieces before they are canned.) The beans "danced a jig" as they passed me, for the moving belt vibrated as though it had pebbles underneath. This jiggling occurred spasmodically for half-hour periods in the morning and was continuous most of the afternoon. After lunch I told Earle, the machinist, the shaking of the belt hurt my eyes. "It's the machines," he said, "they're built wrong. We've worked over 'em, but we can't stop it!"

> Mrs. Rogers said, "It was worse in peas. My eyes used to hurt and water at night when I went to bed. I don't get dizzy like some of the women do, but I get a headache in beans once in a while. Mrs. K. can't work at sorting more'n an hour. This belt don't jump about so much as the other one. It's a newer one."

Quality of Product Injured by Speeding of the Machine

The canner asserts that perfect grading according to size is one of the first requisites of the market. What amazed the investigators was that the standards of work set up were so completely disregarded through the speeding of the machines, the lack of supervision, or any regard for the worker's capacity to maintain the same standard after a time.

The words of Joe B., who said he had worked in can-

neries for 8 years, expressed the viewpoint of others in regard to the quality of the work, when he said, "I can't make 'em out. They (company) orders one kind of sortin', and expects the women to keep at it for ten, twelve, maybe fourteen hours. The stuff that goes into them cans ain't much like the order!"

No matter how many hours Mrs. I. worked, the speed of the belt was such that she thought it was necessary for her to push back the beans that she did not have time to sort properly. The workers considered her an intelligent, conscientious worker. One day she remarked, "The number of 'iron' beans they let go over the belt is fierce. And, my dear, nobody seems to care. Now don't mind what I do. I tell you, let 'em go by, and don't kill yourself."

All day long yellow beans poured on to the belt. The women sorted out as many imperfect beans as they could, as the conveyor carried them past, but could not begin to sort them all. Two women frantically pushed them back with their hands in hope that the stream would soon slacken up. But the snippers poured out the beans so rapidly that the belt brought them the piles they had pushed back. The foreman came to the belt. "It's no good to push 'em back," he said. "You'll never catch up that way. Get all you can and let the rest go." The women relaxed, sorted as fast as they could. The investigator wondered what happened to all of the unsorted beans.

John regulated the speed at which he poured the peas on to the belt. The speed seldom bore any relation to the quantity of peas to be cleaned. "If the belt is too fast, pick out those you can, and let the rest go by," he said.

At the end of a half an hour, I realized that the speed of the bean belt was such that Mrs. G. and I could not attempt to accomplish what we had been directed to do: clean

out all the leaves, stems, dirt and sticks, and snip off the beans the snipper had failed to snip. I slowed down my pace. Mrs. G. asked me if I was tired—tired at eight in the morning. "I will be soon if I work so fast," I told her. Then I observed that the other seven girls at our table did but one part of the sorting they had been ordered to do.

The speed at which the cherries came on to the belt was regulated almost entirely by Sam. Usually he poured so fast that we could not pick out all the defective cherries. Occasionally the foreman pushed back the cherries on to the belt or asked Sam to pour more slowly. Many defective cherries went into the conveyor.

At the pea belt there were periods of work at high speed when the peas were poured on to the belt so fast and were consequently so thick that it was impossible to get all the thistles, shucks and hard peas as they passed. These periods alternated with waits of 3 to 13 minutes when there were no peas ready for John to pour on to the belt.

All these stories emphasize not only the disregard of the workers' comfort, but also the lack of proper supervision to insure carrying out right standards of workmanship.

WORKERS EXPOSED TO EXTREME COLD AND HEAT

Canneries are usually great barrack-like buildings built of wood, without heating equipment in which the workers are exposed to chilling draughts in the cold weather that often prevails in the months when the canneries are working. Even in the summer months the early morning and night hours are often very chilly and at the end of the season, which lasts into October, frosts are not infrequent. Also, the constant opening of doors allows cold winds to sweep through the work rooms. On the other hand, when the machines are running, these same rooms may be full of steam and so hot as to be unbearable. Two pictures of different canneries from the investigators' reports are given here.

> For the past three mornings in August, from 4 until 7 a. m.—when the sun rises—the process building is so cold I cannot stop shivering, and my stiff fingers snip the beans awkwardly and slowly. The 40 or 50 women working at tables wear heavy woolen sweaters over old coats and sit huddled up to keep from getting colder. A few have scarfs around their necks. Some of them have put their feet in empty wooden boxes. "Don't they ever heat the building?" I ask Marie, who sits beside me in a man's heavy overcoat. "Not since I been here . . . They call this summer work, that's why . . . You got to freeze 'til they start the machines. They'll heat us up by noon."
>
> The wind has blown a gale all day, but the temperature indoors is rising. All doors are closed and all windows except one in which the bottom half of glass has been broken out. The smell of beans and steam becomes nauseating, but is preferable to the blast of cold air which enters whenever the door behind our backs is opened by the men going to and from the open shed. "When that door is closed I sweat and when it's open I get chilled. If I don't have a cold tomorrow, I'll know it," are the words of Mrs. J. At noon Mrs. R asks the assistant superintendent to move the tables so that we may face the door when it opens and shuts. "No time today," is his brisk answer. By 4 o'clock the women complain of heavy heads, of damp bodies, aches, and chapped hands. "I wanted to go to a dance tonight," Edna D. tells us regretfully. "But I feel more like going to bed after a day like this. I've got a sore throat." "Days like this, my rheumatism gets me," Mrs. K. replies.

When work is done in cannery sheds, which are of light frame construction open on two or three sides, exposure to the weather is even more serious. Beans must be snipped and corn husked regardless of the weather. Experiences from the investigators' reports are quoted.

> It got steadily colder all the morning. At 11 o'clock there was a flurry of snow. Everybody shivered. My heavy coat kept out some of the cold. I put my hat on as the other women did. A sharp wind swept through the shed on both sides and blew under the tables over our legs. We put our feet inside boxes to get them off the damp, concrete floor. This made them a little warmer but was not as good as a gunny sack. Most of the women were warmly dressed, wearing heavy old coats. The little old lady at the next belt told me she put on a woolen dress and woolen stockings today for she caught cold yesterday. We joked with the foreman, asking for steam pipes or a stove under the table. He laughingly replied he had ordered them. The wind increased. My feet were numb with cold. I stamped them noisily up and down in my box. The shivering women rubbed their hands and all the talk was of the cold.
>
> At noon, half frozen, the women hurried for sunny spots and food. Mrs. K. and I went upstairs to the can loft

where sunshine flooded the dirty, cluttered room. After eating our lunch, we went downstairs to the cooking room where many of us lingered to share the welcome warmth of the steam from the open "retorts." At one o'clock, everyone went back to the sunless, windy snipping shed. By three o'clock it was a little warmer. The woman opposite me looked ill. When she coughed, she said it hurt way down in her chest and ached in her shoulders. The lame woman next me said, "I just dread tomorrow." "You'd better not come," I advised her. "I sorta feel as though I oughta," she said. At six o'clock the day was over. We hurried home.

At another cannery the story is the same.

Everyone at the bean filling tables in the process room complained of the chill and dampness. At 10:30 a. m. the superintendent came inside and said, "You women get busy outside in the shed at the corn." After he had gone the women, already chilled and cold, got together and decided that since a bitter wind was sweeping through the open shed they would not go outside until canvas curtains were stretched on both sides of the sorting belt. Mrs. K., an overworked little woman, explained, "I asked the superintendent to put them up yesterday. Mrs. B. asked him twice. They don't stop the cold but they keep the wind from blowing in on us. They was up last year. He's got them in the store house."

The superintendent appeared again and ordered the women outside at once. Mrs. B. asked him to put up the canvas, while the women began putting on their extra wraps. He made no definite answer. In the open shed the wind cut through the women's clothing. Although wearing two pairs of stockings, long underwear, two sets of undervests, slips, wash dress, a lined winter coat, and two woolen sweat-

ers, I shivered. Each of us wore rubbers, or galoshes, and stuck our feet and legs into a gunny sack and a box, and then placed boxes around our feet to break the force of the wind. After sorting cold wet earns of corn for half an hour the hands of the women were red and stiff, their eyes were watering from the cold, and the positions in which they sat showed they were shivering and wretched. All conversation was of the cold and the attitude of the management. The women said that they could not endure another half hour and talked of quitting.

At 11 o'clock when, owing to the bunching of corn the power was turned off, the women rushed into the open yard beside the shed, stamping their feet, and trying to get warm. Mrs. B. led the group. "Will you strike?" she asked each woman. The answers were "yes" and while waiting for the superintendent the women raced about, waving arms, and stamping feet. At 11:10 the power was turned on and the corn started moving over the belt. But the women agreed they would not go back until the canvas was put up. Ten minutes went by. Then the superintendent came from the shed. "If you will go back at once those canvas curtains will be put up in an hour," he said. By noon the canvas was up. The force of the wind was broken, but the cold grew steadily worse. The women sat sorting cold corn with half frozen fingers all afternoon, and until 9:30 that night.

IT IS HARD TO KEEP DRY IN A CANNERY

Water is used in almost all the canning processes; for washing of corn and cherries, for the blanching of peas, beans and beets, and for the scalding of tomatoes. Consequently, water and steam keep the machines wet while in operation, and all too frequently the floors as well.

There were drains in the floors of all canneries to carry off the water, but in a number of cases the drain failed to serve the purpose effectively and the water ran to other parts of the floor. When the sorting and filling tables were near the machines the women working at them had their feet constantly wet, sometimes for hours at a stretch. Even when there were drains to carry off the water from the machines, the leakiness of many of the tables prevented the women workers from keeping dry.

Wooden slats, which should be provided according to the industrial code governing canneries, were found in only about half of the positions where they should have been. Most of them were too low and did not keep the feet of the workers above the water. Some women wore rubbers. The following comments are indicative.

> Water from the blanching machine ran down under one of the bean sorting tables. The women sat with their feet upon boxes in order to keep dry. To get from the husking machine to any other part of the building, and not get their feet wet, the women have to walk with their heels. Some wear rubbers, others object to the warmth of an overshoe. Water leaks from the washing machine, the conveyors and sorting belts. Several times a day a man sweeps away the water, but it immediately collects under foot.

Occasionally the management provided the women with rubber aprons which were some protection when they were peeling and filling tomatoes and trimming beets. In most places the

women had to provide their own aprons and rubbers for work on corn, cherries, and beans. They complained that the management made them meet this expense.

> "They used to give us knives and rubber aprons here," said a girl. "Now you have to get your own." "Sure they don't give you nothing these days," replied the woman opposite me.

One of the investigators tells of her own experiences.

> About 9:30 I felt my underclothing above the knee was wet. Try as I did to keep my dress and sweater from touching the wet, slippery wooden tables and trays, my clothing was soaked to the skin. I left the table until I found a gunny sack which I tied about my hips with a piece of rope. By 10 o'clock the gunny sack was wet. Searching for another, I found a piece of heavy, dirty canvas. I tied it about my waist and found it covered me from neck to knees. "It's better than nothing," I said when the women working at my table laughed at my appearance. "If you want to keep dry here you got to get your aprons and rubbers. They give you a knife for corn sorting, but nothing else."

TOO MANY STANDING OCCUPATIONS AND MOST OF SEATING POOR

There is a great deal of unnecessary standing at the cannery jobs and, even when chairs are provided, the women cannot sit comfortably at their work on account of the faulty construction of the sorting tables or other equipment.

When filling the cans or feeding the corn husking machines, the women usually stand; often for the whole day without having seats provided. It was only in a few places that women stood at the sorting tables. Every conceivable kind of seating arrangement is found varying from a good type of adjustable steel chair or a wooden chair with a back, to a motley assortment of stools, crates or boxes. This will be seen from descriptions of seating at different canneries.

> Over 100 women sat at wooden tables snipping beans by hand. They sat on all kinds of seats, steel stools, wooden chairs with wire backs, and piled up boxes. There was no question among them as to which they preferred. Whenever a woman having a chair with a back left it for more than a moment, it disappeared and was replaced with a stool, or nothing at all. "You don't get tired so fast if your back can rest while you're working," was the reason given to us by Mrs. R. when we joked about this habit among the workers.
>
> The girl opposite me pointed to her round shoulders and her body humped over the table. I saw that the height of the stool she was sitting on compelled her to sit sideways, her legs stretched straight to the floor. This posture was taken by many of the women. Others sat with their elbows below the level of the table and so had to reach up for handfuls of beans.

Many of the women were sitting at their jobs in very uncomfortable positions.

After I had stood an hour at the bean sorting belt, the woman at the next belt brought my partner an iron stool and an empty box for a foot rest. She pointed to a pile of empty boxes saying, "You can pile up boxes for a seat." I put one box on another close to the belt and sat down. My feet were on the floor, my knees under the table, but I sat too high at the belt to let my arms work comfortably. My partner sat sideways on her stool with her feet on the box. "Why do you sit sideways?" I asked, thinking how tired the muscles of her side and back must get in that position. She motioned under the table. The frame inclosing the moving belt underneath made it impossible for anyone to sit in the proper position and put her knees under the table.

My shoulders soon tired and I stood up to work. C., a young Italian girl, stood beside me for a few moments, then got a box, sitting sideways on it without a footstool. From where I worked I could see, at the other end of the shed, a moving belt rise to the grader at an angle of about 60 degrees. Here Italian women sat sideways on boxes, stools and chairs, because a frame around the belt prevented their knees from getting under the table. Near by two inclined sorting belts extended from the top of the cutting machine (about 7 feet high) to within 18 inches of the floor. The girls working on either side of it sat on low wooden boxes. At the belt of one of the filling machines a girl was kneeling on a wooden box. As each filled can of beans passed her she pressed them down with a blunt wooden pestle, one stroke for each can. Later in the day I asked her how she liked the work. "I get awful tired in no time," was her answer.

When the forewoman placed me at the sorting belt, there was no seat. But the height at which the belt moved past was too low to work comfortably standing. Finally someone gave me a wooden chair made of slats. I tried it, but

the back tilted outward and gave no support. There were a few of these chairs at the belts, but most of the women used boxes. The girls opposite me complained of tired backs. They rested their elbows on the edge of the table as they worked. The work was done in such a slovenly fashion that beans, dark, wilted, and broken went by on their way to the cutting machine.

At the corn sorting belt in the other end of the shed, the women sat sideways on low chairs or boxes and put their feet on boxes. The belt was low and a board along the side kept their knees from getting under it. No one could stand up and work because the belt was on a level slightly above the knees. After three hours each day of this work, I was so tired that I had to make myself "stick out" the hours with the other women. After four hours I tried not to change the position of my body as any motion caused muscle aches in my back and shoulders. The foreman of the cutting machines inside the process house came to the belt two different nights, and complained of the women's work. For a half hour following these moments they grabbed at the corn and sent him clean ears. Then they did not care about complaints. They slumped back into their tired positions and continued a bad quality of work, half sick with cold and fatigue.

In another place, the women sat sideways on wire backed chairs which were raised on small boxes. The seats were hard, so a gunny sack or sweater was added. Frequently, when a woman changed her position, she complained that she could not sit facing her work and put her knees under the belt. The position quickly cramped her muscles. Turning the other side to the belt was the only change one could make. "When I can't sit no more, I go to the washroom and jump up and down," was the complaint of one young girl.

The sitting position of two women at a belt, on to which

beans from the five sorting tables fall, was very bad. The belt was about 12 inches from the floor. Cramped into a narrow space, they sat on low boxes picking out the bad beans that the women on the sorting tables failed to catch. "That belt could have been higher," a woman said one day when the two women complained of extreme crampedness and backache. "They get 5 cents more an hour for working there, though. But Mr. S. has to beg women to work there. It's an awful position. I did it once, and I won't no more." After four o'clock each day the girl sitting beside me took her chair off the wooden box and sat so her knees got under the belt. I copied her motions and found the tiredness in my back and knees was lessened somewhat, but the strain in my shoulders increased. An ache in the back of my neck developed and stayed there for several days.

The investigators reported so many instances where they, together with the other workers, had been standing all day at their work or sitting in cramped positions, that it is impossible to quote them all. Only a few more instances can be given. The following refer especially to standing.

Packing of beans at the two filling tables could only be done standing. The women at the first "line" stood 10½ hours one day, from 7:30 a. m. to 12, and from 12:45 to 7 p. m. The only rest periods were those they took in the washroom, where they could sit down. Once when a delay occurred on the "line" on which I worked, I tried sitting on two different kinds of stools used at the snipping table. I was so tired that I remarked to Mrs. Reese I could lie down on one of the empty bean tables and fall asleep. "Don't you suppose we all get that way?" said Mrs. Reese, who was so tired that her hands fumbled with the beans she was pushing into a can. The Polish woman, who lived in the cannery camp, rubbed her back and sighed. "Every night I'm tired the same as tonight. I get a pain in my side when I

stand so long." The skill with which the women filled the cans decreased as the day grew older; so did the number of cans.

Sixteen women stood at the packing tables pushing beans into cans. "I've worked here the last five years and nobody's ever sat at these tables," said Mrs. P. "Nobody could sit at them; they must be 40 years old. This place needs some new filling tables." The tables were wooden, old and very heavy. If the obstructions underneath were removed and the seats the right height it would be possible for a worker to sit.

In the open shed, where it had been cold the past week, the women never sat while operating three of the ten husking machines. When the "line" stopped they would rest on piles of unhusked corn spread over the shed floor. "Standing is hard on my feet but I can work better."

"I got so tired sitting, my shoulders ache so. I ain't the right height for this belt," was the remark of one worker. It was impossible to sit at the filling tables. They were not built so that sitting was possible and the space beside the conveyor was too small to hold a seat of any kind.

The women employed at the corn husking machines in one cannery visited, were supplied with chairs. They could either stand or sit, but the structure of the machines interfered so much with the use of the chairs that they usually found it easier to stand.

Each woman, feeding a corn husking machine, was provided with a steel chair having a back. From a shelf before which she sat or stood, the worker fed the ears into the machine which was at one side. After two hours of work, the women stood longer than they sat. Two reasons for this were experienced by the investigator. It was easier to shut

off and turn on the power when standing. Sometimes when the ears of corn jammed the mouth of the chute, the worker had to stand and pull them down on to the shelf. After three hours of this stretching and pulling, shoulders and back ached. After five hours, some of the women stood up only when clogging of the machine made it necessary, for even the short irregular periods of sitting somewhat relieved the pain in the back. During the afternoon the women called the foreman frequently to start the machines, and to pull down the ears of corn from the jammed chute.

When I got tired, I resented a 4-inch board nailed against the edge of the shelf to keep the corn from dropping on to my lap or on to the floor. It served this purpose, but in reaching the ears I had to lift my arms above the wooden board or rub them along on it. After several hours, my arms, wrists and shoulders ached and the skin on my forearms became sensitive and red. At noon time the women showed each other this irritation of their forearms. One afternoon, P., in answer to this complaint, sawed off the top half of two of these obstructions. The women said it helped.

Only one plant seemed to recognize the importance of having women seated in comfortable positions. They provided a chair with a modelled wooden seat which was very comfortable. The feet rested easily on the floor and the curved back gave support. However, the working posture had not been studied with sufficient care and provision made for different occupations as the following shows.

The chair was just too low for the height of the belt as the cardboards and cushions many workers used on the seats proved conclusively. Had it been adjustable, this difficulty would have disappeared. Most of the women sat at the belt with shoulders slightly raised, forearms resting on the edge of the belt for support. One girl at the belt complained of backache. She stood up occasionally for relief showing that had the belt been designed for both standing and sitting

with equal comfort, fatigue would have been greatly decreased.

All the women stood while peeling tomatoes at this cannery. Occasionally, when anyone got tired she took one of the metal stools standing about the shed. The tables at which they worked were too high to sit comfortably. The deep pan holding the hot tomatoes necessitated working far enough above the pan in order to give freedom of motion to the arms. The girls who filled the cans or glass jars with tomatoes stood on a wooden slatted platform placed a few inches from the floor. They filled the jars or cans on a tray in front of them by scooping up the tomatoes with their hands from the moving belt. Sitting for this job would have been almost impossible because of the wide wooden frame on either side of the table enclosing the moving belt. To raise her arms to a good working position on a sorting belt, one woman put several layers of thick cardboard on the seats of her stool or chair or laid a wooden tray across it. I found neither comfortable. When I put my sweater under me I saw that other women had put a coat or gunny sack on top of the seat. A few women slumped at their work, leaning their arms on the edge of the belt.

UNNECESSARY NOISE HANDICAP TO WORKERS

The effect of noise on men and women is more and more being recognized as injurious to both their health and efficiency. It is, of course, not always possible to provide a quiet work place but if the noise in a factory can be lessened, every effort should certainly be made to bring this about. Yet the story that comes from the canneries shows a surprising lack of understanding of this factor. The amount of noise to which the women are subjected, as shown in the following sketches, makes it clear why they complained about it so much.

> After working in a room where five snipping machines and the cutters and the motors that run them are in operation, one woman said, "The noise gets me some days. I'm sure I'd not be so tired if there weren't no noise." Another woman said, "Sometimes the noise makes your head throb and your ears ring."
>
> Today the blanching and grading machines, while at a distance from the snipping machines, rattled and clattered at times so loudly that the women would scowl aand look in their direction. "They have noiseless typewriters, wonder when they'll have noiseless machinery," one woman remarked when the noise seemed particularly irritating. Mrs. A. complained of headache this afternoon. "It's the noise, I guess. It gets in my ears. It's just like the machines was on top of us—that blancher clatters like it was tearin' itself in two.
>
> "Why must the machines make so much noise ?" I asked the foreman at noon today. "They're old and need repairs."
>
> "I get so tired at night I sit ten minutes and go to bed. It's the noise, and watchin' that bean belt that knocks me out. Every year it's the same, girls don't stay long here."

Lack of consideration for the comfort of the workers while cleaning factory equipment is another source of noise. Thus

snipping machines were cleaned by forcing live steam from a hose into the hundreds of tiny perforations of the revolving cylinders where the beans get stuck. The noise is terrific while the cleaning lasts. According to one machinist, the "snippers" are supposed to be cleaned at night after work, and sometimes during lunch time. But several canneries cleaned them while the women worked at the sorting tables—which are attached to one end of the machine—one firm repeating this operation four times in a ten-hour day. The stories of the investigators show the great discomfort and stoppage of work caused by this practice.

> After two hours of sorting beans my ears were suddenly shocked by a terrific blast of live steam but ten feet away, as it rushed forth against the revolving cylinder of the machines. I clapped my hands to my ears as did most of the women at the five tables. There were five snippers to be cleaned and the noise continued for nine or ten minutes. When it was over I was slightly deafened in both ears. This happened several times daily while I was employed. Thereafter when the steam opened up I left the belt aand waited in the washroom until it was over. The remarks of some of the women were pointed: "They ought to shut off the machines." "They ought to tell the women to go away. It only takes a few minutes; but it makes you deaf for hours." "I get the ear ache if I stay at the belt." "They should have another way of doing it." "I get so deaf I can't work good."
>
> At 4:30 o'clock, one "grader" was shut down. The machinist began to clean it with a hose of live steam as I had seen the "snippers" cleaned during the lunch hour. The grader was about fifteen feet away from me on my left side. As the steam rushed forth with a terrific blast, every woman at the belt looked up and continued to watch the process as I did. "Hey you," the foreman shouted at us, and the women bent their heads to their snipping while the steam roared in our ears. At the first blast I had covered my left ear with

my hand, and my face showed irritation. I saw C. look at me, then quickly at the foreman to see whether he had noticed how disturbed I was. The foreman stood over us while the steam roared around the grader for about five minutes. A second grader further away was hosed for another four or five minutes. Everyone was apprehensive and restive.

UNSYSTEMATIZED HOURS

In the peak season, especially of peas, June 15th to August 5th, there is the greatest demand for labor and the New York State Labor Law allows women over 18 years to be employed a 12-hour day and a 66-hour week in the canneries. For the rest of the year, however, the 10-hour day and 60-hour week prevail. At no time does the law allow a woman to be employed before six in the morning or after ten o'clock at night.

Because of the dry summer and the lateness of the pea crop, our investigators could not get much work during the peak season. But after August 5th, in the canneries in which they were employed, their hours were often in violation of the law.

Work for Longer than a Ten-Hour Day

To illustrate, on the first day in one cannery an investigator had her time card punched in at 8 a. m. and out a few minutes after midnight, with an hour for lunch and for dinner, showing a working day of 14 hours and 6 minutes. The second day her card read 8 a. m. to 8:30 p. m. and the third day 7:30 a. m. to 9 p. m. which, omitting the time for meals, made up a total of 11½ hours each day. Such overtime was, of course, illegal.

Why long hours make it impossible for the workers to maintain a high standard the following shows.

> For the first half hour after supper, from 7 to 7:30, the women tried to let only the best grade of corn pass by on the sorting belt. They threw out all of the bad and dried ears, cut off the husks not removed by the machines, and cut out the black spots. The fatigue they had known from three until six in the afternoon returned; and the increasing cold that came with the darkness attacked their enthusiasm and they cared less and less what bad corn went by with the good. Even the bucket of hot coffee which Mrs. K.'s husband distributed to them in tin cans at 9 p. m. and the sandwiches or cakes some women had brought, failed to decrease to any great extent their fatigue and make possible better attention.
>
> At 11 o'clock I felt as though I could not possibly endure another hour of the cold and enveloping fatigue. I shifted my attention frequently trying not to fall asleep. I stared at the pump beyond in the open yard; I watched a tall tree swaying to one side in the driving wind. I stood up and sat down. I kept telling myself I must not fall on to the belt, as I had seen another woman do. I watched the other women trying, as desperately as I, to keep awake. Finally Mrs. K. nodded twice and slumped forward toward the moving belt. As she fell Mrs. G. yelled at her and threw a wet ear of corn at her shoulder. The shock of the corn hitting her jerked her back from the belt. She stood up and left the belt saying, "To keep awake I've got to walk." I left the belt, too, and went with her to the washroom. There we stayed as long as we dared, but there was still another hour or more of work.

Work During the Night

At another cannery where an investigator worked all night from 7 p. m. to 5 a. m., the superintendent upon learning that she lived in a nearby town said, "Come at 7 tonight, and if you see any of those girls from C. . . . bring them along." The hours from 10 p. m. to 5 a. m. were, of course, illegal. Instead of using the time clock, the superintendent kept the names of the women in a small book against which he checked their hours. The following sketch will show how much the work deteriorated in quality during the night.

> Last night, at 11 p. m., after four hours of work, I suddenly felt dizzy. When I felt better, I told the woman next to me about it. "Guess you haven't seen the half kid," she replied. "Wait until 3 o'clock in the morning. See that

fat woman over there? She fainted the first night she was here. They had to carry her out. She's almost asleep." I watched the woman's fat hands move aimlessly over the beans without picking up any. Her mouth and red-lidded, staring eyes showed how fatigued she was. At midnight after we had eaten our lunch, the talk was all about how hard it is to get enough sleep in the day time when one has to work at night. Four Italian women stretched themselves out on the wooden floor to rest. Another laid down on the one cot in the washroom.

At 2 a. m. deep purple shadows under the eyes of M. and B. told me how tired they were. At 3 a. m. neither girl could concentrate on the work. Their hands drifted over the beans and heavy eyelids drooped only to be jerked open every few minutes. Rose P., who worked beside me, said repeatedly, "I want to go to bed." Her eyes stared ahead at nothing in particular. Now and then a worker nudged her neighbor awake to keep her from slumping over the belt. Fatigue and the early morning chill made it almost impossible to concentrate on the work. Only a few women worked with attention. By four o'clock the fatigue was almost sickening. I stood up, I sat down, I ate some chocolate, drank water, anything to keep awake.

Work Beginning Before 6 a. m.

Though the law forbids work for women before 6 a. m., a third cannery habitually allowed women to begin hand-snipping of beans as early as 3 a. m. The necessity for increasing earnings because of the low rates, drove the women to work whenever they could, at whatever personal cost. Time cards for these women were always punched 7 a. m. although they had begun to work much earlier. Each day when the time clerk punched the investigator's card she told him that she had begun work before 6 a. m. His only answer was, "It's all right." This

canner also permitted women, who began work at very early hours, to work until 7 or 8 o'clock at night, thus also violating the 10-hour law.

> For the past three mornings, I have begun the hand-snipping of beans before 6 a. m. Yesterday I began work at 4 a. m. Today I was so sleepy at 3 a. m. I couldn't wake up. At 4 a. m. I forced myself to get out of bed and in the dark and cold of the early August morning, drank a cold glass of milk and hurried through the quiet streets of the town to the cannery. More than 40 Italian women and men were already at work at the large tables piled high with yellow beans. As on the previous morning, no one paid the slightest attention to my early arrival. I got an empty crate box and a chair and went quickly to work. I was so sleepy my head nodded frequently. I was so cold my hands were stiff and did the snipping of beans awkwardly. At 7 o'clock the American women came to work. Half of them sat at my table. "I came at 5 today," I told them. "Sure you can come at 3 or 2 o'clock if you want to, but I think too much of my sleep to come before 7," Mrs. P., a neatly dressed woman replied.

Hours of Piece-Workers Perfunctorily Recorded

The story of the investigator goes on to show that the factory hours of work were perfunctorily kept and gave no true picture of the piece workers' hours on the job.

> At 7:15 a. m. the time clerk punched the time cards of each of the 115 women employed. "I began work at 5 today," I told him. Yesterday he had replied, "It's all right." Today he simply nodded his head and passed on to the next worker. When he had gone, I examined the cards of the women near me. "Mine is punched 7 a. m. too, but I came at five," I exclaimed to Mrs. B. and her sister sitting oppo-

site me. "Oh, they punch 7 a. m. and 12 a. m., 12:45 and 5 p. m. It makes no difference because you can work from three in the morning to ten at night if there's work. I don't come before seven." At 3:30 this afternoon, after snipping beans from 5 a. m. to 2:45 p. m., Mr. A., the superintendent, told me I could work at the belt filling cans with beans. This I continued to do until 6:15 when the supply of snipped beans had been canned. I was at the factory for 13 hours today but only worked 12¼ hours; snipping beans by hand from 5 a. m. to 12 and from 12:15 to 2:45 p. m., when there was nothing for me to do for three quarters of an hour, and then filling cans from 3:30 to 6:15 p. m. The time cards, however, showed only 9¾ hours because they were punched 7 a. m. to 12; 12:45 to 2:45, and 3.30 to 6:15.

Unequal Distribution of Work Caused Illegal Hours

The necessity for increasing earnings owing to the low rates, led to rivalry for extra hours of work regardless of the ensuing physical strain. In two canneries an investigator saw women working more than 10 hours a day owing to careless distribution of work or favoritism. Sometimes during the afternoon, the superintendent selected for the extra hours women who had been employed longer and were better known to him, though others on hand whom he might have selected had worked a shorter time and would not have exceeded the legal limit.

> About 4:30 yesterday, after working from 7 a. m., the women began asking if there would be evening work. About 5 o'clock Mr. B., the superintendent, singled out five women to whom he spoke briefly. When he had finished, the woman working beside me explained: "Those are old workers. He knows them a long time. He lets the ones he knows well stay at night." At 5:45 the rest of us were told there was no more work. I wanted to see how long the women would

> work after supper, so I remained with two girls who waited in the cannery for their father to come after them in his car. Shortly after 7 p. m. when the five women had returned to work on the belt, Mr. B. appeared. He noted the time for the women as he stood behind them. One of the girls said to me, "He don't always punch the time clock after seven. So he keeps the hours they work in that book." This morning I asked Helen B. what hour she quit work last night. "After eight," she said. "Do you punch a time clock after supper?" I asked. "Didn't last night," was her reply.

Concealment of Illegal Hours

In another cannery the hours were illegal as indicated by the following from the investigator's report.

> At 12 midnight, the machine stopped. We went to the office and punched the time clock. My card read 12:06 a. m. Until the night watchman said he must lock the door, I warmed myself beside the large coal stove. On the wall beside the chimney were posted many yellow sheets of paper telling the daily hours of work for women. The top was dated today and read: 7:30 a. m. to 12; 1 to 6 p. m.; 6 to 9:30 p. m. "What are the yellow sheets for?" I asked the watchman. "Can't you read?" he asked me. "Sure, but I'm so sleepy I can't read straight." He looked at the sheets. "Oh, these are the daily reports of the hours the company works. It's for the Labor Inspector. He comes often in corn time." "But I worked until 12:06 a. m. this morning and it says 9:30 p. m." "Does it?" he asked. "Well, surely 9:30 looks better'n 12:06." He put out the light and locked the door.

In another instance on the other hand where the 10 hour day was violated, no effort was made to conceal the true record of

hours. The time cards were punched accurately and one plaint paid time and a half for overtime beyond 10 hours.

Irregularity of Hours a Hardship

The irregularity of hours of work is another hardship to the women. There were instances when the good-will of the workers was stretched to the breaking point because the management failed to start work in the morning at a regular hour or at the hour indicated on the previous evening; or to indicate the number of hours they expected to work after 7 p. m. Three women became so provoked at this practice one day that they "simply didn't show up" the following morning. Incidentally, their absence held up, to the annoyance of the superintendent, the morning's anticipated output of canned beans.

> "No one told us when to come today," Mrs. G., a housewife, said yesterday. "We women come at 7 a. m. because we began then yesterday, and the machines didn't begin today 'til 7:30 a. m. They tell us to come and when we get here they begin later. I'm going again to the superintendent and tell him I can't waste my time this way," Mrs. K. spoke emphatically.

The investigator herself reports:

> I was the last woman to leave the cannery last night. When only the night watchman was left, I remembered I did not know what time to begin work on the morrow. I said to the watchman, "Oh, I forgot to ask what time to come tomorrow." "Well, the talk was to come back at 7 in the morning," he began, "maybe it was 7:30, but maybe you'd better come at 7 and make sure!"
>
> Today I arrived at the cannery at 7:30 a. m. but the machines did not start running until 8. Mrs. K., Mrs. G., and one other woman did not come to work until afternoon.

> When they were again working at the filling table, the superintendent came and scolded them for delaying the morning's output.

Better Management of Labor Supply Would Help in Solving this Problem

A description of the hours of work of women is not complete without reference to the canners' use of their labor supply. As we have seen they are still relying upon overtime employment and night work, sometimes illegally, to take care of an oversupply of raw material, and make a practice even of giving overtime work to favored employees, instead of bringing in a new shift of workers.

It is true that the plants are increasingly keeping lists of local help that can be called in. But from the observations of our investigation, there seemed to be no systematic effort to call in such workers for afternoon or evening work; on the contrary, the canners still find it easier to use their regular help.

This is probably due not only to a lack of management but also to the irregular hours and to the low wages paid in the industry, as will be shown in the next section of this report.

> "They keep a list of people that want to work, but I ain't never seen 'em use 'em," one woman explained.
>
> "There are plenty of women around here who'd work if they'd just be decently regular with their hours," was the rather unexpected answer of a man helper on one of the corn belts.
>
> I worked until after midnight last night. Today I asked several women: "Why don't they have two shifts? Is it hard to get workers?" "Not hard, no; S., the superintendent would like two shifts, but I guess the owner's a stubborn fellow. 'You want work?' he says, 'Well here it is!' He don't care how long the hours are."

Wisconsin's Example

In contrast to the extreme irregularity of the hours and the great amount of overtime work in the New York canneries, the hours in the Wisconsin canneries, according to the reports of the Industrial Commission, are being held closely in line with the labor law. In that state the maximum hours for women are 60 per week, with not more than 11 hours on any one day. Wisconsin is also a large producer of peas, which are one of the most perishable of cannery products, and therefore has had to cope with the same problems as New York. The industry in Wisconsin is, however, making a more careful adjustment of acreage contracted for to fit the plant capacity and believes that still more can be done along this line. It has also put into effect a two-shift system of employment to help out in meeting emergencies. All of these schemes it is using in full co-operation with the State Industrial Commission.

LOW WAGE RATES

Since it was not possible, owing to the nature of the inquiry, to secure any information about wages from payrolls or management, our investigators made a special point while they were employed in the canneries of collecting all possible information on the hourly rates of their fellow workers. There was not much difficulty in doing this, since practically all the women in the rooms or sheds in which the investigators worked were paid at the same rate. We therefore have in hand the wage rates of over four hundred women.

FEMALES 16 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER

Rate Per Hour	*Number of Workers*
$.20	264
.22½	20
.25	116
.30	12

The predominating rate for sorting at the belt was 20 cents an hour. At 20 cents a woman working 51 hours a week, the legal limit permitted women in other lines of factory work, would earn $10.20. Everyone will admit that $10.20 is a meagre return for a 51-hour week, and there is little wonder that most workers welcome the extra hours up to 60 or 66 a week which make it possible for them to net $12 or $13.20. They will even work 14 hours a day to increase the daily wage by 40 cents. Yet it is not accurate to say they welcome the extra hours. They welcome the sorely needed extra pay and complain bitterly, as the reports of our investigators show, of their fatigue and exhaustion. No one digs more recklessly into her little capital, her health, than the low paid worker. Irregularity of work, which planning and good management can decrease, also encourages the women to take work whenever they can get it however long the hours.

How low the cannery wages are can be gauged to some extent

by comparison with those paid in another low-wage industry, namely, candy making. As the Consumers' League showed in its report, "Behind the Scenes in Candy Factories", the going wage in 1927 for beginners was $12.00 for a 48 to 54-hour week, although fairly often $14 was paid. Since the establishment of the candy White List in 1928, the beginning wage has been at least $14 in the 71 co-operating factories. This contrasts sharply with the $9.90 paid in canneries for the same length of hours, namely 49½.

While in the candy trade wages ordinarily increased with experience, and, in fact we found that 14% of the workers earned more than $20, there is no indication that a beginner's wage increases with experience during the cannery season, or from one season to another. To all intents and purposes, women are employed at the same processes year after year for the same rate without any difference for variation of skill. In only two instances in the canneries visited were women employed in any supervisory position at a higher wage.

The fact that certain canneries pay 25 cents an hour and even 30 cents an hour, at least for certain operations, proves that in this industry, as in every other industry, some employers believe higher wages pay.

In comparing the wages paid in New York canneries with those paid in California and Wisconsin, the most interesting facts are that New York in general pays a lower wage and does not pay an increased rate for overtime beyond the basic 48-hour week established by the hours law of 1927. The minimum time rate set by the Industrial Welfare Commission of California is 33⅓ cents an hour, and the minimum rate for overtime or work performed after the basic 8-hour day is rate and a quarter, or 41⅔ cents, and for all work performed after 12 hours double the basic rate, or 66⅔ cents an hour. Piece rates must yield to fifty per cent of the adult women working on them not less than the minimum time rates, and the canners themselves pay for the audit made by the State to see that this is done.

In Wisconsin the minimum rate set by the Industrial Commission is 25 cents an hour, except in places with a population of less than five thousand, where it is 22 cents. For overtime after the basic 9-hour day the minimum rate is 33 cents. This method of penalizing overtime work has been found to be effective in both these states in keeping down any very extensive use of long hours even in emergencies. In short, California and Wisconsin have discouraged long hours in the canneries rather than encouraged them as New York has done by its provisions for overtime and its lack of regulation of wages for such overtime.

Excerpts from the investigators' reports tell of the wages they found and the workers' reaction to them.

> Not until today, the second day at the sorting belt, did I learn that I was getting paid 20 cents an hour. The information came at 10:29 when the women were told, "No more work today." We had begun work at 8 a. m. having understood there were enough beans to keep us busy until night. Objections were many. Mrs. G., an old worker, was particularly annoyed. "Twenty cents an hour ain't enough. We should get 30 cents." Hannah P. was listening to her and said, "Trouble is, there isn't another factory in this place to make 'em raise wages!" Ruth D., of high school age and recently married, said, "If I had to work steady I'd ask for 30 cents. You can't live with 20 cents an hour. Last week I got $7.10 and Lucy, my chum, got six something."
>
> "They hold back one week's pay and pay on Wednesday. We get 20 cents an hour on beans and they say you get 25 cents on filling. It seems kinda little. The work ain't hard, but it's awful tiresome. I think they ought to pay 30 cents an hour. I've worked here four weeks and I haven't drawed a full week's pay yet. Week before last I drew $6.30. We ain't worked regular since I've been here."
>
> "But I haven't drawn $12 a week since I've been here on peas; $10.50 is the most I've got. Last week my pay

was $2.50. We worked only two nights until 6 o'clock. Not enough to pay for the baby's milk. Twenty cents an hour isn't enough."

"When we work less'n 10 hours (a day) I get less'n $2. Two dollars ain't enough for 10 hours. Workin' at the belt gets you so tired. Some factories pay more for overtime. We ought to get more'n 25 cents regular, and more for overtime."

That the women have tried to get higher wages is shown in the following sketches.

"Last year the women tried to strike for more pay. Half stayed in, so we couldn't do nothing."

B. told us today of the strike of the Italian women two years ago for 22½ cents an hour. "They were getting 20 cents an hour. It was right while the tomatoes were waiting for them in the ketchup house. The boss told them to go back to Buffalo for he wouldn't pay more. But he didn't think they'd go. They packed up and asked for the trucks to take them. So he paid them 22½ cents an hour, but this year it's only 20 cents.

Some of the American women said that the low piece rate and low hourly rate were based on the willingness of the Italian women to do the wet, unpleasant, and monotonous work of peeling tomatoes, cutting beets, and snipping beans for long hours.

The company pays 1½ cents a pound for hand snipping of beans. A comparison of the hourly earnings made by Italian and American women shows that the Italian makes more. At 10 a. m. No. . . ., a very fast Italian woman, said she had made $1.86. She said she began work at 3:30 a. m. If she did she made .286 cents an hour. Her friend said, "She works like a dog. She fills many boxes of beans, yes;

but she is thin and maybe get sick by 'n by." The most that Nora H. made an hour was 16 cents. An Italian woman working beside me made 21 cents an hour for the first three hours of work. One old Italian woman made 26 cents an hour snipping beans by hand. When she mentioned the amount she added, "But I've worked steady ten hours and now I'm good for nothing but bed." "Them Italians set the wages. They work hard for any pay. If American women want work they got to take the same here."

By 2 p. m. the piles of beans on the eight tables were nearly leveled. The women began calling, "Tony, more beans. We want more beans to snip." After Tony had dumped two boxes on our nearly empty table, we asked for more. "All, all," he yelled. "No more beans today, all you get." The women at our table persisted. The woman to my left yelled to him in Italian. Tony's face darkened and he replied angrily. The woman hurled her answer. Tony came to the edge of the table, shouting and waving his arms. When he was gone, the new girl asked, "What does he say?" "He says he don't give the Italian women from Buffalo more beans than us. But I tell him he does. He always does. He not fair. His wife at one table. He's a beast. I hate him." It is the daily answer of many women. Tony's "game of favoritism" as it is called among the women. One has but to compare the big pile of beans on the two center tables with the low piles on the other six at any time of the day to know why the women "hate" him.

When Tony dumps a box of beans on one of the six tables, he also dumps one on each of the two center tables. I have watched him each day. He edges near the crates of beans piled on the hand truck. When every woman has a few beans to keep her busy, he quickly dumps the extra crates on the two center "Buffalo" tables, still covered with enough beans to keep the women snipping until five o'clock. Mrs. P.

was infuriated at Tony's action. "If it wasn't for them Italians we'd get decent wages. They take anything you give them. They'll work for a cent and a half a pound. That's why we American women have to."

As the tomatoes fell from the blanching machine into pans, Joe, the foreman, knew which pan contained a greater amount of good tomatoes. The Italian women got the best always. The helper brought me and other American women, pans of cold, green, blemished tomatoes, until we protested. Some of the Italian women were so skillful and got such clean tomatoes that all of their pails were whole tomatoes.

In plants where the American workers on the machines spoke against the low wage, the management threatened to replace them with Italians who would accept less.

The foreman talked today about wages to two of the younger women operating husking machines. He was telling about the owner, who had passed through the husking room a few minutes before. "He's a high-hatter," he said, "owns five canneries. He only paid 20 cents to the women before we got the machines. They're new this year. When he decided to put American girls on them I said, "Pay 'em 30 cents an hour and I'll see they work." "But why 30 cents an hour?" asked one of the women, "why not 35 or 40?" But he don't have to pay 30 cents. Why those Italians will come for 20 cents any day we say."

Why don't they pay the girls as much as men?" one woman asked the foreman. "Cause they don't have to. If the American women don't take what we give, we can get all the Italians we want at 20 cents an hour."

HOUSING FOR IMPORTED WORKERS

For many years the canners having plants near small towns have made a practice of bringing workers, largely Italians and Poles, from the large industrial centers to increase their labor supply. Whole families come for this summer migration and live in the quarters furnished by the canners. According to the reports of previous investigations, the accommodations were in most cases found to be wretched and without proper sanitary provisions. Although it was not possible for our investigators to make a thorough study of the housing problem last summer, some account of their observations will be given.

A half mile down the dusty road we come to two one-story tenements, "row-houses," of the cheapest construction, unpainted and dilapidated. They are about 25 feet apart and although Mrs. S. tells me "one row of houses has been put in order by the company" one tenement looks as unfit for habitation as the other. Between the two houses a water pipe sticks two feet out of the ground. Piled about it are broken crate boxes and tree limbs to be used as firewood. "That's where we get our water," the Polish woman tells me. "Water and wood is free." The interior of the three small rooms where Mrs. S. and her four children live, has been "put in order." The peeling white-wash exposes the dust and stain of former seasons and signs of dampness appear on the wall and cracks under the windows. The cookstove is too heavy for the floor and the corner where it stands sags down, causing the chimney to lean and give off smoke while dinner is being cooked. "It's not so bad as the empty homes," explains Marie the 14-year-old daughter. "But it's so hard to keep clean. I scrub and clean while mama is at the factory."

"The doors and windows don't fit," Mr. S. says, "they let in flies when it's hot and wind when it's cold. Can't keep

warm." "Where do the flies come from?" I ask. "From the garbage over there on the road," is the answer. "Company doesn't take it away once a week but says it will."

Marie shows me the two straw mattresses, one in each of the two tiny rooms directly behind the kitchen. They fill the rooms, are wedged in between the wooden walls, one on a sagging wooden frame, the other on a broken-down iron bedstead. There are two small windows. "Five of you live here?" I ask. "Six until last week," Mr. S. replies. "My boy, he sleep on the floor 'til the mice won't let him sleep."

During the noon hour I watched Italian children playing in the yard about the cannery camp situated on a hill opposite the factory.

"What are the houses like?" I ask the engineer. "They're cut up into apartments of various sizes for the Italian families. If I had a dog I cared anything about I wouldn't let him live in those shacks. The mattresses are mouldy. They've been there for years."

Two days later I go to the camp to see for myself how the Buffalo people live, and to talk to the Italian woman "boss" of the colony. In the middle of the yard is a pile of decaying garbage. The stench is sickening and hundreds of flies swarm upon it. Near by, three small children are playing. I find the "boss" of the camp standing over a boiling hot cook stove. Reluctantly she answers my questions and permits me to see a few of the three-room apartments. "No garbage cans," she explains. "City takes away when wants to. Sometimes once a week, sometimes two weeks. Not my business to watch garbage, I watch children while mama work in cannery. I see nobody comes in houses while all work in day time."

"Workers all come from Buffalo. Company pay railroad back if stay all season. Seventeen families live in house.

Yes, rooms too small for family. When fire in kitchen nobody stays in house, stove so hot. Everybody stay outdoors 'til go to bed." "Wood and water free? Yes. Baths? Men wash in cannery; women get water from faucet in pans. Don't wash many times. Go sometime to lake over far hill—Sundays maybe." The three-room apartments she shows me are all alike. The kitchen and two sleeping rooms are so small that only one person at a time can pass around the cook stove; and one must crawl over a bed in order to get into it. There is no space for a table in the kitchen and pans containing berry pulp have been put on the beds and braced against the window sills to get them out of the way. There they attract hundreds of flies. Heavy wire grating is nailed over the window spaces in which there are no glass panes. There is so little light in the kitchen that the condition of the walls and ceilings cannot be seen."

The deplorable conditions revealed here agree in practically all details with those found years ago in the cannery camps. It is clear that no lasting changes were made and that today the quarters, so far as we observed them, are just as neglected as they were at the time of the Factory Investigating Commission's study.

Yet a practical method for providing facilities that are decent and offer at least a minimum of comfort has been worked out. A cannery housing code is included under the Rules of the Industrial Board. Also, more recently, the State Conservation Commission in managing the tourist camps in the state parks has set up a standard which the canners might well study. For every family in the camp it supplies at least one connection with a water supply of tested quality, a fireplace with wood supply, and covered garbage can, contents of which are removed at least once a day. There are also within easy reach, well-constructed comfort stations which are kept clean and sanitary. These are

the elementary provisions for decent living which the state provides for the hundreds of persons seeking summer recreation in the parks.

Is it too much to ask that the canners should provide at least these minima for the workers whom they bring from their homes and lodge on their own premises?

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

In view of all the facts set forth in this account of New York canneries, it is clear that much thought must be given to improving the conditions of work and all that affects personnel, and adequate remedial measures taken, if this industry is to measure up to any fair standard of factory management. The hourly rate of wages is too low. Third, some effective means must be found to regularize hours of work and keep overtime within reasonable bounds. Recognizing that even the most efficient management sometimes contends with unforeseen difficulties which contribute to long hours, the Consumers' League still believes that there are several ways here as in other states in which these difficulties may be met. This problem it seems to us may be attacked from various angles.

How Hours of Work Can be Regularized

Better Use of Labor Supply. To the extent that long hours are due to lack of proper recruiting and lack of proper use of the labor supply to meet the needs of the cannery, the Consumers' League suggests the following.

That before the season begins each plant should make up a list of names and addresses of all available workers in the locality far more exhaustively than has been the practice up to the present time, and make use of this list for employing the regular force as well as for working up a list of persons on reserve to be called in for emergencies.

A special agent, other than the superintendent, should be in charge of this work, whose name should be sent to the Industrial Commissioner before the season begins, as it should be through this agent that the company should co-operate with the Commissioner in seeing that all the provisions of the labor law are obeyed.

The appointment of such an agent is an innovation in New York State, but it is the very effective measure required by the Industrial Board of Wisconsin to control especially the hours of cannery work. With a better use of the labor supply under the supervision mentioned here, it should be possible at rush times to obtain two shifts of workers, which are now regularly installed in the Wisconsin canneries handling perishable materials, and thus avoid the present practice of keeping at work in the evening people who have already worked the legal hours.

Also, if through this procedure, hours of work were regular and if notice were always given in advance of the exact hours for beginning work—when there is necessary variation in the schedule—there would without doubt be a more stable labor force, attending with greater regularity, and feeling a greater responsibility toward their jobs.

Possibility of Controlling the Supply of Raw Materials. While there is no doubt that putting into operation an efficient two-shift system is the most immediate method for cutting down the overtime in New York canneries, yet the situation calls for intensive study along other lines. Nothing that has been done in this state seems as yet to have struck at the root of the matter, although the experimentation that is going on in other states indicates very clearly that more can be done if proper attention is given.

In so far as the cause of overtime work is due to an attempt to handle a varying supply of raw material, with the result that during rush periods the capacity of the plant is exceeded and overtime and night work frequently employed, we suggest that there are possible ways in which the supplies may be more effectively controlled. More effort should be made to have the planting and harvesting and especially the delivery of crops regulated so that oversupplies will not be delivered to the cannery. In spite of difficulties due to varying weather conditions, farmers and canneries can work in closer co-operation to bring a more

even flow of produce to the plant. Under the same conditions, Wisconsin has found through actual experience that acreage for which they contract can be made to more closely approximate the capacity of the plant and supplies can be better regulated. Even holding them one night allows more leeway in getting them through the sorting process for which the women are employed.

In recent years, as we all know, it has been found possible to bring peas from Florida and California in remarkably fresh condition to the New York market. Does this not indicate at least that the possibilities of cold storage at the cannery as a resource in emergencies has not been fully tried out?

Higher Wages for Overtime. Management would presumably make greater efforts to eliminate overtime if it had to pay higher rates for it as in California and Wisconsin.

Fair Wage Rates Should Be Agreed On

We found wages in most cases are at the very low level of 20 cents an hour; no higher rate is paid for overtime, and no increase is given for greater experience or skill.

No able industrialists hold briefs for depressed wages. It is poor management to have wages which the imported labor is willing to accept made the basis for the wage scale.

If the Canners' Association would determine in co-operation with the Industrial Commissioner what are fair wages for the various operations and fair overtime rates beyond the basic 48 hour week, probably the majority of the industry would pay these wages.

In another low-wage industry—candy making—at the suggestion of the Consumers' League a minimum wage of not less than $14 to beginners for a full week is now being voluntarily paid by at least 71 manufacturers. These wages represent a considerable advance for many manufacturers.

Better Working Conditions Would Increase Production

Equipment. So far as machinery is concerned, much has been found that is antiquated, in poor repair, or ill adjusted for the job. Especially the jolting and shaking of conveyors, as noted in the report, wears out the workers and makes their jobs far more fatiguing than need be. It hardly seems necessary to point out that a thorough checking up and the making of repairs or remodelling of all such equipment are of prime importance.

Seating. In checking up the technical equipment of the factory, the problem of seating the workers should be newly considered, with full knowledge of the relation between seats and the machine and the type of work to be performed. In cannery work, as in all other factory employment, bad seating adds appreciably to the tiredness of the workers. It decreases their efficiency and visibly affects the quality of the product. When thought is given to this problem, as has been done by forward-looking management, it has been found possible in other industries to have women comfortably seated at their jobs. In the best arrangements, as required by California cannery law, chairs are adjusted to the work tables or the machines in such a way that the worker can either sit or stand, and in both cases her relation to the work is substantially the same. To make this possible in New York canneries there is need of much new seating equipment in almost all the plants visited, and also of considerable rebuilding in removing obstructions under tables and at machines which now interfere with the proper posture of the workers.

Rest Periods. Experience in other industries shows that especially for repetitive processes, among which may be included cannery work, rest periods of 10 to 15 minutes, in the middle of the work time, both morning and afternoon, refresh the worker and undoubtedly stimulate production.

Noise. In view of our new knowledge of the effect of noise

on health and efficiency, especially in industry, the inattention to noise of machines and the shock from use of live steam for cleaning which we found in the canneries shows that changes are much needed. In well-regulated plants the sorting tables for women are placed at some distance from machines, and often separated from them by partitions as well. If employers realized how much they handicapped their workers through subjecting them to constant noise, they would without doubt make every effort to eliminate it.

Exposure. Similarly our stories show the advisability of scrutinizing very carefully all parts of the working environment and devising methods of giving far better protection to the workers. Good practice would certainly consist in seeing that they were not subjected to cold, to rapid changes in temperature, and to draughts, in the factories, nor to wind and storm in the sheds. There are remedies both simple and practical for these conditions.

In addition, it is not too much to expect that the floors where the women work should be free from water, or that effective slats and foot rests should be provided that will keep their feet dry. Likewise, in order to remove the possibility of having the water leak down upon the women from tables and machines, as is often the case now, equipment should be overhauled, or replaced. In processes where there is unavoidable moisture or spraying of juices over the workers, it is but fair that management should provide waterproof aprons or other protection.

Cannery Camps. Gross defects in housing should be remedied. There is need of new construction, better sanitation, and a thorough clean-up of the quarters provided for immigrant workers. Only constant policing of such premises will bring about lasting improvement.

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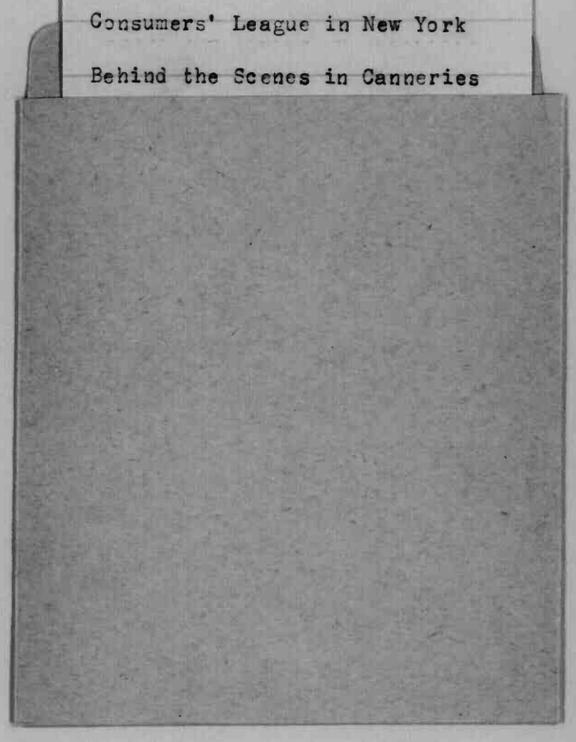

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